

Kenya Birding

THE NATURE KENYA MAGAZINE ISSUE 15, 2021


NatureKenya
THE EAST AFRICA NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY



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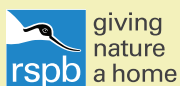
- Mount Kenya, next to Bantu Lodge
- Kinangop Reserve, North Kinangop
- North Coast, Gede office
- South Nandi Kobujoi Eco-resource Centre
- KENVO resource centre in Lari
- Taita Eco-resource centre, Taita Hills
- Dakatcha Woodland resource centre, Marafa near Hell's Kitchen

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ABOUT NATURE KENYA

Nature Kenya (the East Africa Natural History Society) is a non-profit conservation organisation. Established in 1909 it works to promote the understanding and conservation of nature.



The wave that lifts all boats

Birding in Kenya is one of the most amazing and fulfilling experiences compared to anywhere else in the world. Am I biased? Probably, but I know there are many who would agree with me. Also, time and again we see why this is not hype — on the global birding 'BIG DAY' in October 2020, Kenya came 1st in Africa and 5th in the world, with regards to the total number of species seen during 24 hours. *Read about it on page 24.* It doesn't get wide recognition nor is it obvious, so let me say it here — birding in Kenya is extraordinary!

This magazine promotes the appreciation and conservation of birds and their habitats, and is closely aligned to bird tourism and guiding. We celebrate all that we can achieve together. At the moment however, we find ourselves in strange and difficult times — a time of COVID-19 — with little in the trending news that is uplifting for tourism (or the environment). It is not unlike a seasonal wetland that is parched and barren when the weather is hot and dry.

But, then I remember how seasonal wetlands dramatically come to life with rain. Pools of water form, tubers and roots hidden in the soil grow new shoots, and grass and wildflowers fill the land with colour and life. I take heart that likewise these dark times will give way to brighter times, when the abundance and variety of birds we are blessed to have, will once again be enjoyed by many local and foreign visitors.

It is therefore imperative for us to hold the line — bird tourism will be back bigger, better and stronger than ever, as a big wave that lifts all boats. It creates economic opportunities for many and provides the means for local communities to conserve birds and their habitats. Birders will continue to be willing contributors and partakers, as they travel around the country in search of birds.

Welcome to another issue of *Kenya Birding* and happy birding!

Catherine Ngarachu

Editor, Kenya Birding

CONNECT WITH NATURE

Join Nature Kenya as a member



By becoming a member of Nature Kenya, Africa's oldest environmental society, you take part in the conservation of Kenya's unique animals, plants, sites and habitats some of which are faced with the threat of extinction or degradation.

You also contribute to enhancing local community livelihoods and empower others to engage in conservation.

As a member, you enjoy other benefits such as:

- FREE bird and nature walks, subsidized trips to exciting locations
- FREE access to all museums and museum sites in Kenya
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Bronze Sunbird on *Leonotis* (top) by **Peter Usher**, Red-naped Bush-shrike, by **Abigail Church**, is an eastern bird seen on the 2020 Big Day in the dry scrub of Tsavo, and Ayres Hawk Eagle by **Peter Steward**.

Saving nature during the time of Coronavirus



Paul Matiku **Executive Director**

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected lives globally. Government directives to help reduce the spread have included lockdowns, the wearing of masks, 'social distancing', limits to the number of people allowed at meetings or gatherings, and work-from-home options.

Owing to this, the Nature Kenya office has been closed to members and the public since April 2020. Memberships (individual and corporate) and income streams that are linked to donations, sponsorships and fundraising events have nearly collapsed. The communities that we work with were also affected by the COVID situation. Butterfly farmers around Arabuko-Sokoke Forest were helpless as the export of butterfly pupae collapsed in April and May 2020, as did tourism at the Hell's Kitchen eco-tourism site at Marafa, in the Dakatcha Woodlands. People across 26 sites where Nature Kenya works struggled with the loss of jobs and markets for local produce, while also having to counter the increased threat of illegal logging.

But, despite these challenges Nature Kenya has been resilient, connecting with members and local communities at sites across the country, and continuing to work on a number of projects. We provided 'soft' loans to farmers to buy seed and for their immediate needs. At Hell's Kitchen we gave support to the local Site Support Group to put in place COVID measures to keep visitors safe. Nature Kenya provided a grant to each of 26 Site Support Groups to intensify their forest monitoring, awareness and advocacy efforts.

Thank you, for your continued support in these challenging times.

Round-up of Nature Kenya activities around the country

In the Rift Valley

Nature Kenya has presented evidence to the Kenya Electricity Transmission Company showing that the recently erected high voltage electricity transmission line by Lake Elmenteita is a death trap for migrating birds. KETRACO has declined to acknowledge the carnage. We will not relent in our efforts to make KETRACO move the power line so that it is not in the migratory flyway.

At Lake Naivasha the construction of a dam, and an industrial economic zone and dry port will put the lake at risk. Nature Kenya, with partners, is engaging the government, for their recognition of the ecological value of Lake Naivasha. On a more positive note, the Kenya Civil Aviation Authority is listening and considering Nature Kenya views about the planned expansion of Lanet Airport, which is a threat to both aircrafts and birds.

At the coast

Nature Kenya is working with the Tana River County government to spur economic growth and create jobs while helping nature thrive in the delta. We are supporting supply chains that support the sale of honey, fish, milk, chilli, sunflower, and simsim. Through the establishment of an Indigenous Community and Conservation Area, seed collection and tree planting across an area of 130,000 ha, the Tana River Delta is now more sustainably managed.



Sorting of assorted wild tree seeds at the Tana River Delta. Photo by Caroline Chebet

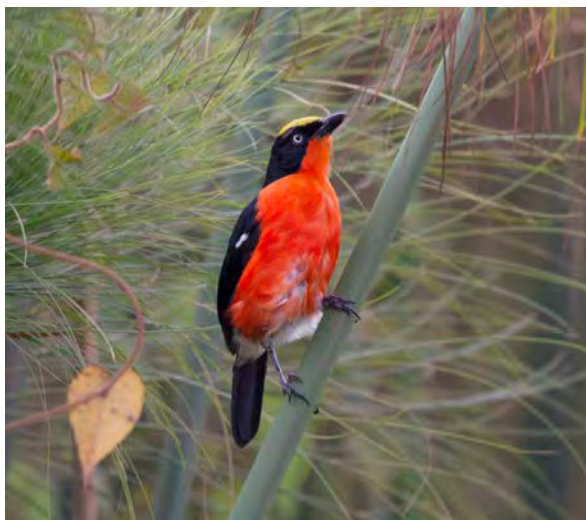


Hell's Kitchen tour guides in new uniforms bought through Nature Kenya support. **Photo by Caroline Chebet**

The purchase of 1,810 acres of wetlands and woodlands at Dakatcha will help to safeguard Clarke's Weaver from extinction. However, a much bigger area of land is needed and Nature Kenya welcomes every donation to help purchase more land. Please support Nature Kenya's land purchase work <https://naturekenya.org/support/donate/>

At Yala Swamp

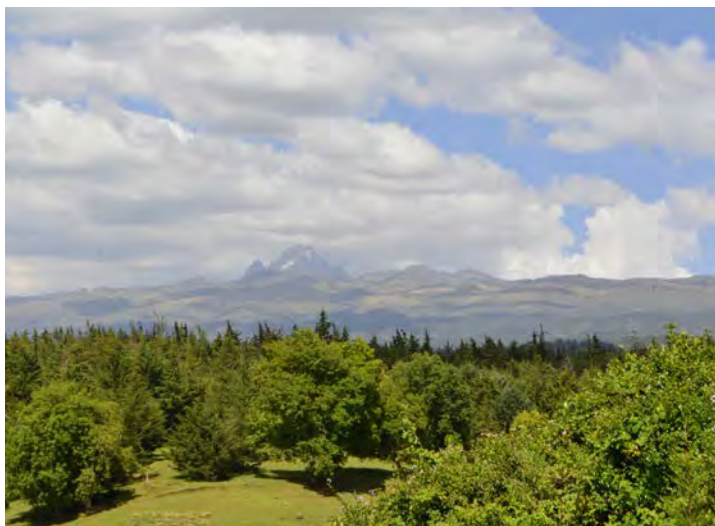
With the lessons learnt in the Tana River Delta, Nature Kenya helped develop a Yala Swamp Land Use Plan, guided by a strategic assessment. This land use plan is guiding the Siaya County government in deciding on the allocation of land requested by a company called *Lake Agro* that has applied to take over the area previously farmed by the now defunct Dominion Farms. Land use planning has proved a very powerful science-led advocacy tool to safeguard nature.



A Papyrus Gonolek in Yala Swamp. **Photo by John Caddick**

Around Mount Kenya

A strategy and business case for the restoration of Mount Kenya forest has attracted support from local and overseas supporters, including the *Kenya Breweries Limited*. Kenya Breweries agrees that the Mount Kenya forest is important for water, industry, irrigation, hydropower generation and water for drinking. *Coca-Cola Kenya* has also agreed to provide leadership and support for Nature Kenya's work with Community Forest Associations around Mount Kenya forest.



A section of a restored forest block in Mt. Kenya. **Photo by Caroline Chebet**

In Narok (Mara), Kajiado (Amboseli) and Kipeto

Nature Kenya has continued to work with four vulture liaison officers and 65 vulture volunteers in the Mara and Amboseli landscapes. The volunteers work in the community to help stop the retaliatory poisoning of wildlife after carnivores kill livestock.

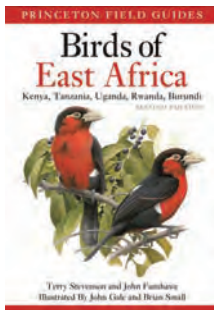
At Kipeto, Nature Kenya is working with Kipeto Energy Limited to reduce vulture deaths caused by wind turbines.

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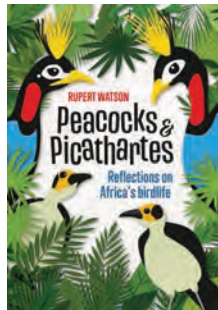
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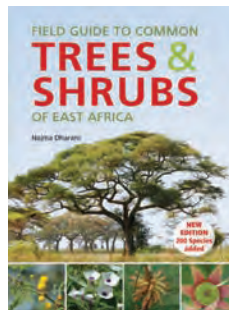
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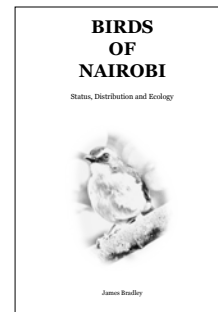
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See purchase details on page 19.

MOBILE APP

Birds of Africa David Fox, Chair, African Bird Club

The African Bird Club (ABC), the charity dedicated to the conservation of birds and their habitats across Africa, has successfully launched a revolutionary new birding app called Birds of Africa. Developed for ornithologists, birders, atlassers, and others with a general interest in birds, the app is a field identification guide that is also intended to be an aid to conservation.

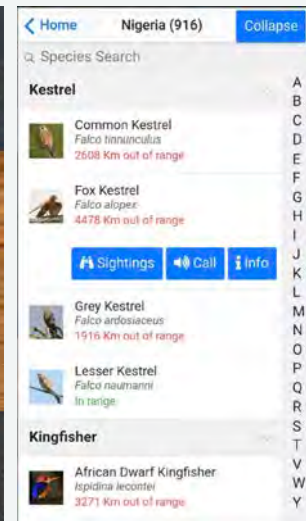
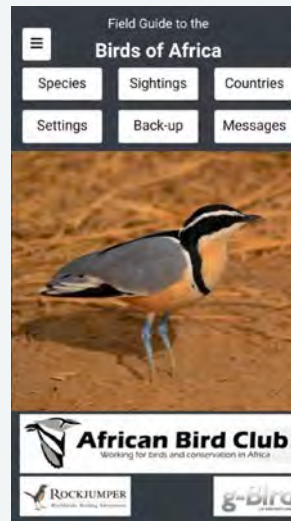
DOWNLOAD NOW

The latest version of the app is available, for free, from the Apple App or Google Play Store.

Over time, the app will feature all species and countries in continental Africa, Madagascar, and other Indian Ocean islands. The next phase of the app is covering East Africa, starting with the Horn of Africa for which a limited Ethiopia list of the more common birds is already included. An initial Kenya list, aimed especially at younger and new birders, is expected in June 2021. The full Kenya list, with over 1,200 species, is in the works and users of the app will be notified when this is available for them to download.

WHAT'S INCLUDED It includes text, maps, photos and sounds

ABC's objective from the outset of this project was and still is for the app to be accessible to all. We feel that this will provide a real benefit to conservation across Africa. However, the development and maintenance costs of the app are substantial. So, if you are able to make a donation to assist this work, it would be very much appreciated. You can securely donate online to ABC at <https://www.africanbirdclub.org/shop/donate>



FEEDBACK FROM USERS

Users have described the app as:

"an incredible resource that transforms birding in Africa"
"easy to use"

Having **"every detail a birdwatcher in Africa could use or require at any time"**

Try it yourself and let us know what you think by leaving a review of your own.

At present, the app includes text, maps, photos and sounds for some 1,200 bird species on the checklists of the following countries and islands: Annobon, Benin, Bioko, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Chad, Equatorial Guinea, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Ivory Coast, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Sierra Leone, The Gambia, and Togo.

Also, the app has been piloted successfully in Nigeria and the A P Leventis Ornithological Research Institute has produced a short video showing how bird clubs in that country are using the app. You can watch the video at <https://tinyurl.com/7hz48zy8>

YOUR NATURE OBSERVATIONS



Photo by James Christian

A Northern White-crowned Shrike cleaning a scrub hare

It was early evening September 20, 2020 at our camp in eastern Laikipia, called Tumaren. I saw a **Northern White-crowned Shrike** plunge to the ground, going after an insect I assumed. Moments earlier I had, out of the corner of my eye, seen some other movement in the area. Out of curiosity I got out my binoculars to look to see what might be happening. To my surprise I saw the shrike perched on a scrub hare's back. The hare had its ears down and was in a passive posture as the shrike slowly cleaned or groomed through its hair to remove what I assume were ticks or possibly fleas.

Another Northern White-crowned Shrike then joined the first bird and the two birds continued to groom together. Their activity certainly looked practiced, yet despite having white-crowned shrikes and hares around our camp daily, we had until then, never observed this interaction.

I wrote up this observation and sent it to friends, and birders on the kenyanbirdsnet listserv. In response, I received information that this mutualistic relationship had been previously recorded by Rob Glen (in Garissa), Terry Stevenson (in Baringo), and by another observer in Tanzania.

James Christian



Photo by George Kamau

Southern Grosbeak Canary

Ikombe Village, 29 October 2020

On the 24th of this month I drove toward Kitui via Machakos, past Masii to Katangi Shopping Centre and then north 20 km to Ikombe village.

My birding there produced some great birds for me — birds like **Black-necked Weaver**, **Green-winged Pytilia**, **Southern Grosbeak Canary** (a lifer for me), **Mouse-coloured Penduline Tit**, and **Banded Parisoma**.

George Kamau

Grey Crowned Cranes

Athi Plains, 6 September 2020

At the Swara Plains Wildlife Conservancy we counted +100 **Grey Crowned Cranes** feeding on wheat stubble together with six **Spur-winged Goose**.

We also saw **Bustards** — seven **Kori**, eight **White-bellied** and a **Hartlaub's**. Some of the White-bellied Bustards appeared to be in breeding plumage with erect black feathers, like very short ruffs on their heads and necks. The only migrant seen was one **Common Sandpiper**.

Heather Elkins

Capped Wheatear in Nairobi National Park

24 October 2020

The repaired road going east from the East Gate turnoff in Nairobi National Park is a few centimeters below the surrounding land surface, and the piles of soil and rocks on each side (plus the ubiquitous hibiscus) do not make easy wildlife viewing. The wheatears like it, however, and today there were **Northern Wheatears** near the SGR and a **Capped Wheatear** near no. 9, the first one I have seen in the park in a long time.

At Athi Basin Dam among the usual birds, two **Grey Crowned Cranes**, an **African Open-billed Stork** and a handsome drake **Knob-billed Duck**.

Fleur Ng'weno



Photos by Sammy Mugo

A ringed White Stork

22 March 2021

On a birding photography trip to Tsavo East last week I photographed this **White Stork**. While going through my photos I noticed the ring...maybe we can somehow find the ringer?

There are indications that this stork was ringed in Poland.

Sammy Mugo



African Quailfinch Photo by Darcy Ogada

Thika jackals and birds

13 December 2020

My plan this morning was to check on the family of side-striped jackals that reside on the Del Monte Kenya farm and pick up some birds along the way. It turned out to be a good morning. I managed to see 4 of the 5 jackals.

It was also quite exciting to see and photograph a pair of **African Quailfinch**, which were definitely a first for me at Del Monte.

I saw quite a few migrants including a **Western Yellow Wagtail**, which I believe is a male of the *lutea* race. Other migrants seen were **Western Marsh Harrier**, **Turkestan Shrike** (**Red-tailed**), and **Willow Warbler**. About 10 days ago there was a group of 17 **Eurasian Hobbies** that passed over the house at dusk.

Another surprise was a **White-headed Saw-wing**. Zimmerman notes that they range here, but I'm

pretty sure that it's the first time I've ever seen one in Thika. It was foraging with a larger group of mostly **Plain Martins** in the yard. I find saw-wings quite interesting — at times they are among the most numerous in the sky, other times there are none to be seen. I guess this is because they don't breed in the Thika area.

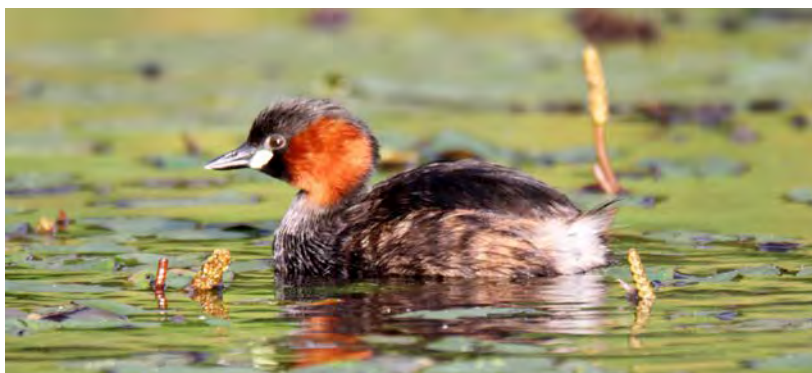
Other birds seen this morning were **Green-backed Honeybird**, **African Firefinch**, and some of my more interesting regulars including **Scaly Francolin**, **Grey-olive Greenbul**, and **Hinde's Babbler**. The male **White-winged** and **Red-collared Widowbirds** and **Pin-tailed Whydahs** were all looking spectacular in their breeding plumages.

Depressingly the roadkill has already begun on the newly tarmacked road running through Del Monte that will be a bypass around Thika.

Darcy Ogada



I had to lighten this photo considerably because it was still dark when I set out. I believe this is one of the young ones because the 'side stripe' is hardly noticeable and it looks fluffier than some of the others.



Little Grebe Photo by Mustafa Adamjee

Homa Bay waterbird census on 30-31 January 2021

2 March 2021

The census in Homa Bay County was done at three sites: Lake Simbi Nyaima, Ondago Swamp and at the Nyangweso Rice Irrigation Scheme. Jeam Agutu, Crispine Ngesa and I carried out these counts.

(The numbers indicated in parentheses represent the number seen.)

On 30 January we set out to count waterbirds at Lake Simbi from 6:35-7:35 a.m. and recorded **Little Grebe**, **Greater Flamingo** (186), **Lesser Flamingo** (4,600), **Grey Crowned Crane** (22), **Black-winged Stilt**, **Long-toed Plover**, **Hamerkop**, **(Western) Cattle Egret**, **Ruff**, **Wood Sandpiper**, and **Malachite Kingfisher**.

From Lake Simbi we went on to Ondago Swamp (from 7:50-10:20 a.m.). We had **White-faced Whistling Duck**, **Egyptian Goose**, **Lesser Flamingo** (1,665), **African Water Rail**, **Purple Swamphen**, **Common Moorhen**, **Grey Crowned Crane**, **Black-winged Stilt**, **Common Ringed Plover**, **Three-banded Plover**, **Long-toed Plover**, **Greater Painted-snipe**, **Hamerkop**, **Great White Egret**, **Yellow-billed (Intermediate) Egret**, **Little Egret**, **Sacred Ibis**, **African Spoonbill**, **Hadada Ibis**, **Long-tailed (Reed) Cormorant**, and **Western Marsh Harrier**. **Spur-winged Plovers** were feeding in the homesteads like chickens. There was also **Little Stint**, **Curlew Sandpiper**,

Ruff, **Common Snipe**, **Common Sandpiper**, **Marsh Sandpiper**, **Wood Sandpiper** (40), and **Malachite Kingfisher**.

On 31 January we went to Nyangweso Rice Irrigation Scheme. The rice was already harvested. Among the waterbirds we recorded were **Egyptian Goose**, **Grey Crowned Crane** (128), **Spur-winged Plover**, **Common Sandpiper**, **Wood Sandpiper**, **African Open-billed Stork** (8), **Hamerkop**, **(Western) Cattle Egret**, **Grey Heron**, **Little Egret**, **Sacred Ibis**, and **Hadada Ibis**.



Long-toed Plover Photo by Mustafa Adamjee

We stopped briefly at Kendu Bay Pier and in the papyrus were three **Greater Flamingo**.

Homa Bay is a good birdwatching destination. The roads are good and well signed.

Jennifer Oduori

Most of these posts first appeared on **KENYABIRDSNET**, an email lists where local subscribers post interesting bird sightings, observations of unusual bird behavior, and news about birding activities in the country. It is now hosted on Google Groups. To join go to: <https://groups.google.com/d/forum/kenyabirdsnet>



Photo by Peter Steward

Amur Falcons

12 December 2020

Yesterday, I counted 75 **Amur Falcons** flying south, at around 6:20 p.m. in Loitoktok, southeast Kenya.

Isaac Kilusu

Kenya Virtual Birding Tours Film Series

Online on YouTube, 9 August 2020

In an effort to share this country's wonderful birding experiences with the whole world, I've planned a series that will feature birding in Kenya. All episodes will be freely available on a YouTube channel and can be found at <https://tinyurl.com/4s4szhm4>

Please subscribe to get notifications whenever I post a new episode.

Washington Wachira

A Tsavo birding weekend



African Marsh Harrier



Quail Plover

June 2020

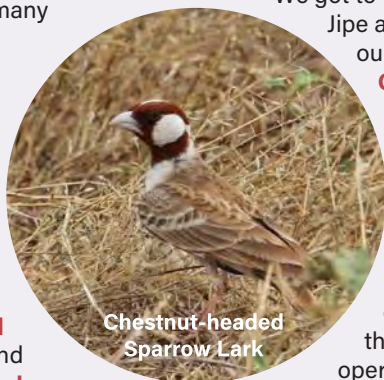
As soon as the counties of Kwale and Kilifi were lifted from the Coronavirus-related lockdown in June, I planned to travel to Voi to do some birding with Doris Schaule in Tsavo. We arrived at the Tsavo East National Park, Voi Gate, at around noon on a Friday.

Tsavo East, south of the Galana River, is mostly open bushed grassland with dams and drinking pools. We drove a long loop eastward along the Aruba circuit, checking out the many water holes along the way. The highlights on this day included a **White-headed Vulture** and a **Bateleur** soaring not too far from the Voi Gate, flocks of **Chestnut-headed Sparrow Larks**, and about 40 **Red-billed Teals** near the 'white sands' watering hole.

On our way back from Aruba we saw a pair of **Lappet-faced Vultures**, loads of **Pangani Longclaws**, **Pink-breasted** and

Red-winged Larks and a few **Golden Pipits** on the plains.

We left Tsavo East very early the next day to go across to Tsavo West National Park and Lake Jipe. This part of Tsavo receives more rainfall than the drier East side and as we made our way towards Lake Jipe through Maktau Gate we picked up **Shelley's Francolin**; **Fawn-coloured, Singing Bush, Friedmann's** (heard) and **Short-tailed Larks**, and **Tiny Cisticola**.



Chestnut-headed Sparrow Lark

We got to the bandas at Lake Jipe and while taking our lunch added

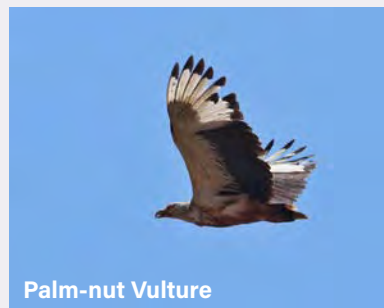
Grey-headed Gull, Whiskered Tern, Southern Red Bishop, Taveta Golden Weaver

and many common waterbirds (herons, lapwings, cormorants). Sadly, the boats weren't operational, so we didn't go out on the lake.

As we left the bandas I spotted a pair of raptors flying over the surrounding grassland and nearby airstrip — they were **African Marsh Harriers** looking for lapwing chicks, which were

plentiful in the short grass. We also had a **Palm-nut Vulture** flying overhead.

Making our way back to Maktau Gate, we added: **Pygmy Batis, Three-streaked Tchagra, Grey Penduline Tit** and **Yellow-bellied Eremomela** to our list. **Pringle's Puffback** was also heard, but didn't come out of hiding.



Palm-nut Vulture

On Sunday we planned to visit Tsavo East again, but this time we took the pipeline road going north from Voi Gate, and drove towards Manyani. On this day we had **Senegal Plover** (**Lapwing**), **Somali Coursers**, a pair of **White-headed Vultures** (3 were seen on the trip); and **Black-capped Social Weavers**. Best of all was a **Quail-plover!!!!**



Greater Flamingo in flight

South Coast counts on the weekend

Saturday 8-Sunday 9 February 2020

We started off at Tiwi Pond as it was full of water and had flooded the nearby grasslands. However, the waterbirds were generally few and were concentrated in a small part of the pond, where the local children were not fishing. There was **Greater Painted-snipe**, good numbers of **Black-headed Herons**, **Hadada Ibis**, and **Malachite Kingfishers**. Other birds included three **Temminck's Coursers** (new for the pentad), and among the many raptors we saw that morning, a pair of **African Hawk Eagles** flying overhead.

Milalani Pond, near Msambweni, had good numbers of **African Jacana** and **Egyptian Goose**, a lone **Saunders's Tern** and a **Wood Sandpiper**. The Kisol Dam at Ramisi, was almost bare with only three **African Darters**.

The Mkurumudzi River estuary was much better —waders, terns and gulls were in good numbers with **Lesser Sand Plovers**, **Crab-plovers**,

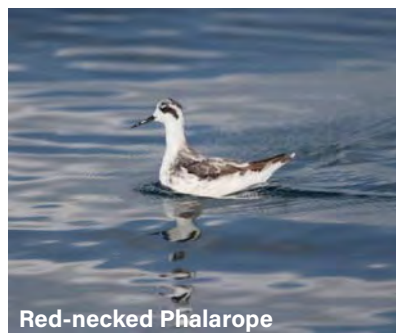
and **Lesser Crested Terns** being the most numerous.

On Sunday we decided to explore other areas. We started with the Kongo River estuary at dawn and found a few waders roosting on the beach. Scanning the open ocean, there appeared to be hundreds of birds floating on the water.

We quickly found a fisherman to take us out in their direction. They turned out to be **Red-necked Phalaropes** and they were many more than we expected — I would say there were at least 3,000 birds in many scattered flocks.

As we turned and headed back to shore, six **Greater Flamingo** flew over the beach — it was the first time I'd seen flamingo at the South Coast.

At around lunchtime we decided to visit Funzi Bay, which is at the mouth of the Ramisi River. Here we got a boat to take us around



Red-necked Phalarope

the bay and a small way up the crocodile-infested river. A large sand bank yielded good numbers of **Lesser Sand Plovers** and **Lesser Crested Terns**. We also found a single **(Western) Osprey** and saw incredible numbers of **Palm-nut Vultures** and **Yellow-billed Kites**.



What Frigatebird is this?

July 2020

It was early morning in Diani, on the South Coast, the seas were rough and it was raining heavily. At around 9:30 a.m. I decided to have a late breakfast and just as I looked towards the sea, I spotted a large bird being followed by a bunch of **Indian House Crows**. I quickly ran for my camera and snapped a couple of photos. Despite the poor light conditions the photos show a kind of Frigatebird. It is much bigger than the crows behind it and has very little white on its chest. What Frigatebird is this?

*The consensus from the Kenyabirdsnet is that these photos show a **Lesser Frigatebird**.*

Pin-tailed Whydah
Photo by Peter Usher



Local insight solves the puzzle of the breeding habits of the Pin-tailed Whydah

Rupert Watson


The male **Pin-tailed Whydah**, in breeding plumage, is a small striking black and white bird with a bright red or orange bill and a long floppy tail. It is commonly seen in grassland areas. In my recent research into the early days of African ornithology, I was particularly struck by the role of early settlers or administrators, who were also gifted observers, and how much their observations were enhanced by the knowledge of the local people who had lived with the birds for generations.

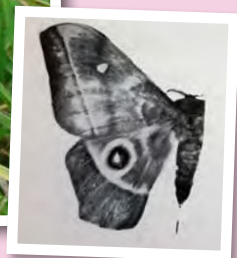
Frederick Jackson was one of those archetypal amateur naturalists who, from 1885 to 1895, held an administrative post in Eldama Ravine, then in Uganda. All his spare time he devoted to studying birds, not least Pin-tailed Whydahs, especially the breeding males which were prone to displaying so prominently.

For 10 years, Jackson searched for the whydah's nest but without any success until, in desperation, he offered an assistant, Baraka, a reward of 50 rupees if he could find one.

Jackson later wrote in his seminal *Birds of Kenya Colony and the Uganda Protectorate*: 'After several weeks of patient watching ... he (Baraka) one day announced his conviction that it did not make a nest but that the hen-bird laid her eggs in the nest of Common Waxbill as he had found the nest of the latter with four small white eggs and a larger one of a distinct creamy colour. Subsequently he and I found several nests of the Waxbill ...with similar larger and cream-coloured eggs and I

venture to claim that to Baraka, now dead, is due the credit of solving the mystery.'

In South Africa, renowned ornithologist and author Austin Roberts reached similar conclusions, quite independently but via a slightly different route. In the 1907 *Journal of South African Ornithologists Union* he describes how when talking about the birds to an old Natal settler, the farmer happened to mention that "the Zulus have a saying that a young King Red-beak (Pin-tailed Whydah) is reared out of every "rooibekje's (Common Waxbill) nest"! 



This caterpillar was on the grass, but a black wattle tree nearby had many individuals. A few days later they were all gone. Photos of larva and Emperor Moth by Catherine Ngarachu and Steve Collins respectively.

Emperor Moth

This striking caterpillar is the larva of an Emperor Moth that is looking to go underground to pupate. The adults have no mouthparts and so stay as a pupa for months. They hatch with the rains, then mate and die. The female will put out pheromones upon hatching to attract males. She will mate once, lay about 200 eggs on the foodplant, and die. The moths typically have large wings with eyespots, which may help to deter potential predators.

Steve Collins



Rupert Watson is the author of **Peacocks and Picathartes - Reflections on Africa's Birdlife** recently published by Struik. It is available online, from bookshops in Nairobi (Bookstop and Westland Sundries), or from the author (rupertwatson48@gmail.com) at KES 2,000/- (also from the author is a half price student offer).



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Nature at home in **Loresho**

Peter Usher

Photos by Peter Usher



African Cuckoo-Hawk

A year ago, I adapted to the COVID-19 pandemic by taking a weekly and solitary nature walk through the Nairobi suburb of Loresho. Now, 52 weeks on, I reflect on the weekly walks that I take armed with my camera. (See Kenya Birding (14) to read about Peter's initial walks.)

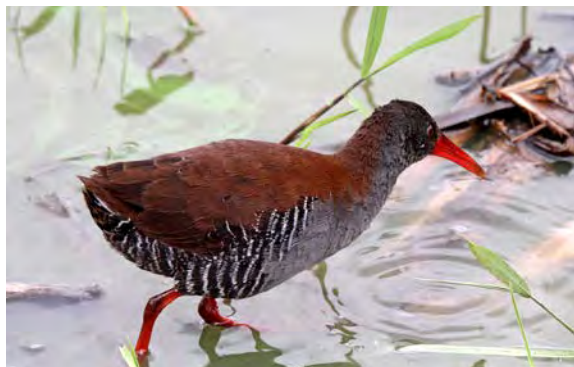
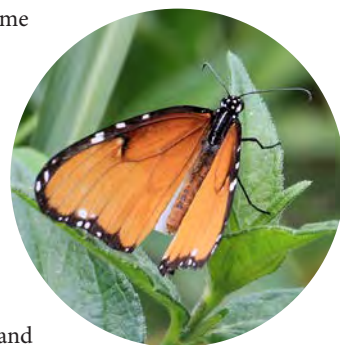
Loresho is a short drive from my home and it lies about 10 km from the Nairobi City Centre. It is the home of the Nairobi University Kabete Campus and the Kenya Agricultural & Livestock Research Centre. Much of the area is planted with high quality coffee that is both studied and sold. Beans, maize, kale and cabbage are grown amidst the rows of coffee bushes. A large dam, home to a variety of waterbirds, is the northern limit of the birding area.

To the south of the Agricultural Station is the principal coffee plantation that is divided in two by a natural swamp. Covered in dense reed beds it is home to moorhen, crakes, ibises, and swamp-loving warblers and waders that are frequently heard, although not often seen.

An average birding day results in sightings of more than 50 species and sometimes, half as many again. As a photographer, I can expect to capture reasonable images of about a third of these that I share with family and friends

through an illustrated newsletter, distributed by email. Recipients frequently resend the newsletter to their contacts and the distribution list now reaches nature lovers in Europe, Asia and the Americas providing, hopefully, a distraction from COVID lockdowns and restrictions.

The newsletter has changed over time to include pictures of insects and wildflowers. Butterflies became a growing passion and Loresho has its share of many beautiful species. In one month, there might be large numbers of Orange Acraea, the next month, the Acraeas are gone and migrating clouds of Brown-veined Whites or African Monarchs are all there is to be seen. Elaborately coloured pansys and swallowtails catch the eye, but a more careful



African Water Rail



White-winged Widowbird and Chestnut Weaver



Photos clockwise: Golden-winged Sunbird, Brown-backed Woodpecker, Rüppell's Robin-chat and Broad-billed Roller.

look reveals tiny, yet daintily marked Blues and Hairtails. The wildflowers too, vary with the seasons, and the bees, bugs and beetles they attract become subjects for my camera. Landscapes too were eventually added to the newsletter, resulting in a comprehensive diary of the changing face of the area as the weeks and the continuing virus scourge dragged on. Also, I was no longer alone. A few birding friends joined the walk. Social distancing and mask wearing, in line with Government guidelines, is necessary, but the extra eyes are invaluable in locating and identifying a greater number of birds.

Despite these wider interests, birds continue to have pride of place in the newsletter, however common. Bulbuls, mousebirds, weavers (**Grosbeak, Baglaffeht, Spectacled, Speke's**, and more); sunbirds (**Collared, Amethyst, Bronze, Golden-winged**, and **Variable**); the miniature finches, waxbills, and mannikins; **Grey Crowned Cranes** and the constantly patrolling **Augur Buzzard**, which is perhaps the classic resident bird of Loresho, are my delight.

A special treat is the sight of a male widowbird with its extravagant plumage (the females are somewhat nondescript). Absent from much of Nairobi except the National Park, they are resident in Loresho. Widowbird pictures in the newsletter astonished one correspondent. He had travelled many hours to the Tanzanian border to photograph the mating dance of

the **Jackson's Widowbird**, a performance involving the male jumping high in the air in the hope of attracting a passing female. He might instead have made the short journey to Loresho to observe, not just Jackson's, but **White-winged** and **Red-collared Widowbirds** too, with the Jackson's employing a different courting ritual, preferring to lounge on top of a coffee bush awaiting attention rather than frantically jumping up and down!

Sometimes it seemed like one weekly visit was much like the last, but there were the changing seasons, and the avian migrations, with which we witnessed raptors, bee-eaters, warblers, swallows, all passing through.

There were also the rare species like the **African Open-billed Storks** that flew past in a large flock and disappeared, never to be seen again. Other sightings have included a **Scaly Francolin**, **Purple Swampphen**, **African Cuckoo Hawks**, **Common (Steppe) Buzzard**, and **Broad-billed Roller**. Strangest of all was a single **Helmeted Guineafowl** - they are usually part of a flock on lowland plains rather than alone in the cool Kenya Highlands.

The wealth of Nairobi's birdlife is epitomised in the Loresho birding experience and for now I guess, with a third wave of the virus developing, I know where I will be found on most Sunday mornings. f



Nesting Paradise Flycatcher (left) and Chinspot Batis. Photos by Titus Imboma

Bird Ringing in 2021

Nairobi National Museum Gardens

Titus Imboma and
Fleur Ng'weno

Ringling sessions (and training), take place weekly at the Nairobi National Museum grounds. Nature Kenya members and the general public are welcome to come and appreciate birds at close range.

The passage of migratory Willow Warblers, Garden Warblers, Red-backed Shrikes and Lesser Grey Shrikes was outstanding this year. On one April morning, the Nairobi Ringing Group caught, ringed and released 29 Willow Warblers at the Museum grounds in the heart of Nairobi.

The Nairobi Ringing Group was started in June 1994 in recognition of the demand for training in the techniques of bird ringing, and monitoring bird distribution and movement around Nairobi. It is a practical and participatory means through which both scientists and bird enthusiasts have been encouraged to support conservation initiatives. The main objective of the group is to recruit and train bird ringers to a high ethical and scientific standard. Trainee bird ringers are drawn from both professional ornithologists and amateur bird watchers who are keen to learn the skills and techniques to be competent and independent in handling and ringing birds.

With the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, ringing activities were put on hold from March last year. Ringing activities slowly resumed in early October 2020. This coincided with the opening of the Michuki Memorial Park, now managed by the Kenya Forest Service, and enjoined to the Museums botanical garden as a single ecosystem. A fence, providing security for birders and the general public recreation area around the Museum, now encloses the park. Since the President declared the site a park, with full protection, we have realized an increase



Male and female Black Cap and Garden Warblers. Photo by Titus Imboma

in species diversity and some species have even increased in numbers at our ringing site.

In a span of five months from October 2020 to March of this year we captured – and released – a total of 241 birds, out of which 47 were recaptures. A total of 33 species were captured and ringed within Nairobi National Museums ground during this time.

As usual, the most captured species were **Baglafecht Weaver** (167 individuals), **Red-billed Firefinch** (144 individuals) and for the first time, **Willow Warbler** (75 individuals — the highest number of Willow Warblers captured at the Nairobi Museum ringing site). This was followed by **Streaky Seedeater** (48 individuals) and **Northern Olive (Abyssinian) Thrush** (37 individuals). Sunbirds are the most species-rich group of birds in the Museum grounds, with eight species captured. None of these have been recaptured at the site.

Besides Willow Warblers, a good number of other Palearctic warblers were captured from November until May, with many recaptured. These included **Marsh Warbler** (35 individuals), **Blackcap** (8 individuals), and **Garden Warbler** (23 individuals). A **Common Rock Thrush** was captured for the first time on the Museum grounds. This first year (immature) bird was among early southward migrants. Most (82%) of the migrants were captured in March and April, including three **Sedge Warblers**, which were all captured in April. Our last migrants were captured in late mid-May.

Some special Afrotropical species have included **Green-backed Honeybird** and **Lemon Dove**. One amazing record was of a **Blue-spotted Wood Dove**, a species that was not just new for the Museum grounds, but also new for the entire Nairobi region.

All these success stories, despite the COVID-19 pandemic, show how consistent bird ringing at a common site can provide important ecological information on both local and migratory bird species.

(We want to express our appreciation for interns at the Museums' Ornithology Section, who regularly turned out to put up nets in the evening even during rainy days in readiness for the morning's ringing)



Ringed Common Rock Thrush. Photos by Titus Imboma



A volunteer ringing a Streaky Seedeater at the Nairobi National Museum Gardens. Photo by Titus Imboma

Bird ringing – also called bird banding – involves catching birds in fine nets and extracting them with care. The birds are then identified, measured, weighed, and fitted on one leg with a lightweight metal band with a unique number. In Kenya the words 'Inform Museum Nairobi' are embedded in the metal ring.

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Black-chested Snake Eagle **BREEDING**

Dominic Chesire



Photo by Peter Steward

On 4 November 2020, Nicodemus Nalinya, formerly with the National Museums of Kenya, reported a pair of **Black-chested Snake Eagles** nesting at the banks of a dry river in Kajiado. Our small monitoring team went in search of the nest and found it built on top of a lone, tall yellow-bark acacia (Fever Tree) growing on the river's embankment. We could see an eagle at the nest nurturing a white fluffy chick.

Black-chested Snake Eagles are white below, but have a black head and throat. In flight, they show black barring on the tail and on the flight feathers. Like other snake eagles, they have noticeably big heads and yellow eyes.

Besides Nicodemus and myself, the team consisted of Abraham Mwangi, Solomon Wuapi, Noah Lantei, Edward Ntikoisa and we visited the nest regularly, to keep an eye on their progress.

Being so similar in appearance it was hard to tell the male and female eagles apart. When we visited the nest we observed one adult who remained at or around the nest and shaded the young nestling from the scorching sun — we presumed this was the female eagle. We found that the female patrolled the area habitually, searching for food, but always keeping within sight of the nest. The male was only observed bringing food, perhaps because he would go larger distances in search of prey.

When successful in hunting, the female fed the chick upon arrival. The adult male would fly in with prey and be received by his partner. He did not feed the chick, leaving it to the female to feed the young chick. The chick consumed small prey whole, but otherwise received help from the mother, who would step on the prey to allow the chick to pull out pieces with ease.

As the chick continued to grow, it became very cautious of intruders. When we first started visiting the nest it would stand, preen and stretch. With time this changed — the chick stayed still and inconspicuous when



The pair of Black-chested Snake Eagles on their nest. **Photo by D. Chesire**

we were around. As it grew the adults spent longer periods of time away and there was less activity at the nest.

During the second month of our monitoring the young chick started shedding its feathers as it began to develop. **f**

(At the time of writing these observations, the chick is still at the nest.)

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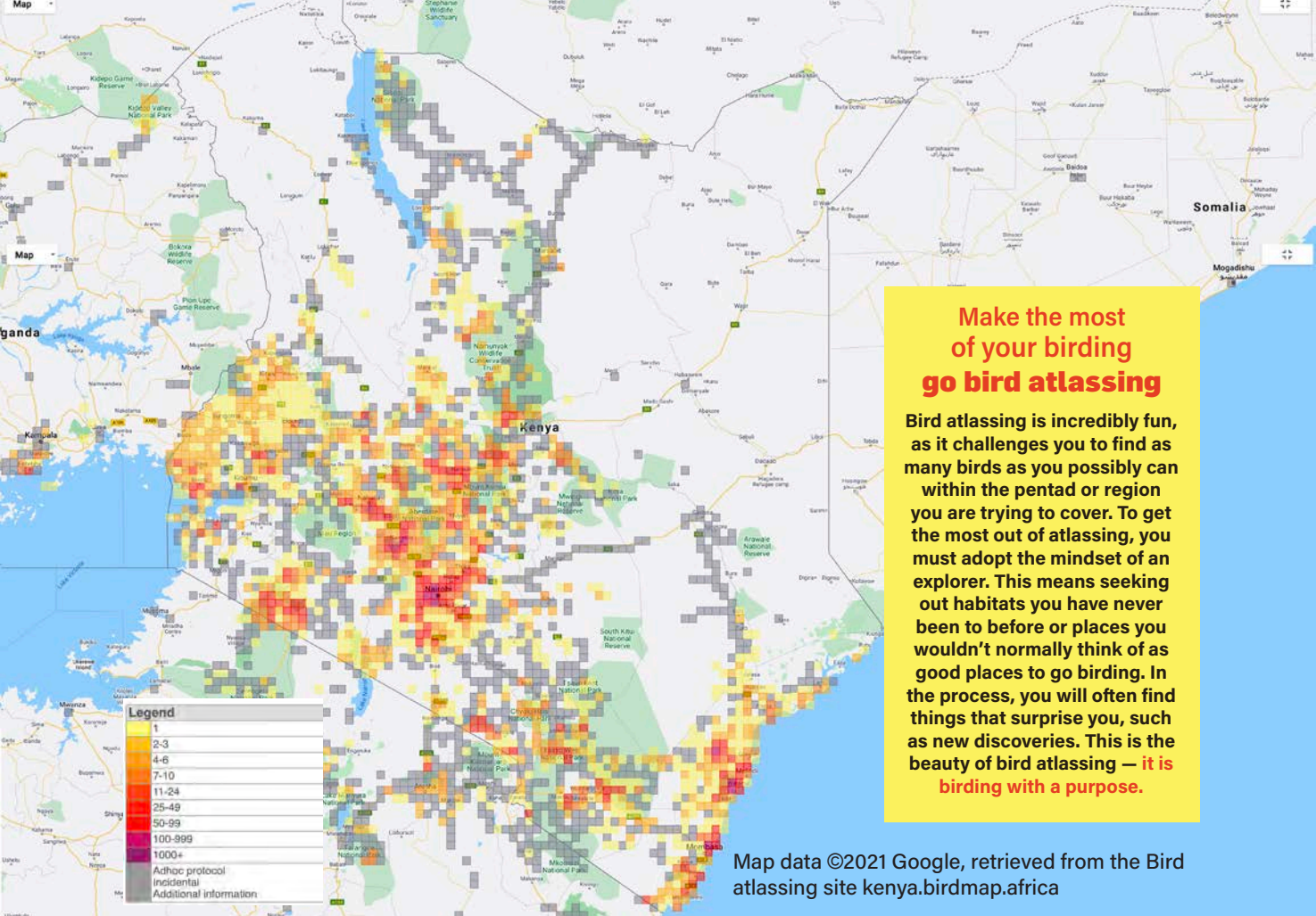
To order this book, send an email to crotonbooksandmedia@gmail.com to receive payment instructions and a download link.

White-backed Vulture *Gyps africanus*



DS: Widespread Afrotropical resident, FC (Jan-Dec); Mar high count of 100 birds (NNP – 1999).

A sample species account in the book.



Kenya BIRD MAP

Sidney Shema

an update on the project coverage

The *Kenya Bird Map* project uses pentads, geographical units measuring about 9 km x 9 km, to systematically record bird observations throughout the country. Out of the country's 6,817 pentads, the project has received records from 1,230 pentads or about 18% of the country.

The central highlands and the coastal strip are by far the best-covered regions of the country, followed by the Lake Victoria basin and along the border with Tanzania. However, this is not to say that coverage within these regions is uniformly good — in between well birded areas are sizeable expanses that are blank or have only scattered ad hoc records.

Some of the best-covered areas to the west and south:

Kakamega-South Nandi Forests; the area from Port Bunyala through Siaya to Kisumu (including Yala Swamp); the greater Masai Mara and pentads north to Bomet town; the Loita-Nguruman Hills (south of Narosura), Shompole, and Lake Magadi; the Athi Plains and Kipeto escarpment; Ol Donyo Orok; parts of Amboseli; parts of Chyulu Hills; parts of Tsavo East, south of the Galana River, and Tsavo West, Lumo Conservancy and the Kasigau corridor.

The “Big North” is still very poorly covered. Pentads having full protocol lists north of Mount Elgon and those north of the Laikipia Plateau, all the way to the Ethiopia border, are few and far between. The best-covered parts of this region are in the hills around Maralal; the Samburu-Buffalo Springs-Shaba reserves north to Archer's Post and Kalama Conservancy; some of the pentads around the Ndoto Mountains, including the Milgis lugga; a few of the Mount Nyiru pentads; about 15 pentads in Sibiloi National Park; and some pentads between North Horr, Kalacha, and Forolle. A handful of pentads at Mount Marsabit also have full protocol cards.

The entire northeast is completely blank on the *Kenya Bird Map*, save for a few *ad hoc* records. The counties of Wajir and Mandera are yet to have a single record.

Another immense gap, with very few atlassed pentads in it, is between the Tana River, Galana River, the western boundary of Kitui County, and the Kilifi-Tana River county boundary. The tiny handfuls of pentads that have full protocol lists are in Kora National Park, the Muumoni Hills, Mount Endau, and in Tsavo East National Park.




Heuglin's Bustard, a bird of the dry north and east.
Photo by Sidney Shema

It is understandable that the northern and eastern parts of Kenya are still scantily covered, due to the region's insecurity. But, this means that we know very little about the current distribution and status of birds that are restricted to those areas. Such species include the **Collared Lark**, **Bafirawar's Flycatcher**, **Abyssinian Ground Hornbill**, and **African White-winged Dove**.

There are however still many gaps in other parts of Kenya that are quite safe and not too difficult to access. A good example is Migori County, which so far only has five pentads with full protocol lists. Vast areas of the neighboring Homa Bay County also lack full protocol lists. The northern Loita Hills (north and west of Narosura) only have *ad hoc* records, and this gap stretches east to Mount Suswa and north to the Mau Escarpment.

The Mau Forest itself remains very poorly atlased. Especially the huge forest blocks in Bomet and Narok counties. The area between Mount Elgon, the Cherangani Hills, Kakamega and Bunyala also needs a lot more attention from atlasers. We still have very few records of this region's special birds, which include **Piapiac**, **Spotted Creeper**, **Black-bellied Firefinch**, and **Purple Starling**.

The area between Kajiado Town, Chyulu Hills, and Amboseli also remains rather blank. Tsavo is huge and still has very many blank pentads.

I invite every birder to join the *Kenya Bird Map* project (if you haven't already), and make an effort to help grow our coverage. 

Please visit our website kenya.birdmap.africa to learn more about the Kenya Bird Map project. To participate click on the **Register** tab on the main menu to sign-up. You can use the **Coverage Map**, also accessible from the main menu, to view and plan your next atlasing adventure. I hope you will join us on this very important, and very fun project, to better understand and help conserve Kenya's birds!

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Narina Trogon Photo by Peter Steward

Mount Kenya and Meru National Park Birding

Stratton Hatfield and Peter Steward

Species lists, sound recordings and additional photos for this trip have been uploaded at ebird.org — see the links in the text below.

It was on Monday 12 October 2020 that Pete Steward and I set off to explore Mount Kenya and Meru National Park. We were eager to pick up a few species (especially African Finfoot, Pel's Fishing Owl and Black-and-white Shrike-flycatcher) for our Kenya and life lists on this birding trip, and it did not disappoint.

Departing Nairobi, our first stop was at the Blue Post Hotel in Thika. From here we were able to walk along the Chania and Thika rivers for a few hours where we picked up a family group of **Grey-olive Greenbuls**, a pair of **Brown-hooded Kingfishers**, a **Black-throated Wattle-eye**, hundreds of **Eastern Golden Weavers**, a sub-adult **Crowned Eagle** and a pair of **African Hobbys**. (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S74814815>).

Getting back on Thika road we stopped briefly by the bridge over the Tana River for **Hinde's Babbler** who readily appeared. From here, we went east around Mount Kenya

headed for the Chuka Forest Station. We drove a little way into the forest on a surprisingly good road, but it was midday and very quiet except for a few pairs of **Kenrick's Starling**, which flew over the road providing a welcome lifer for Pete. At one of our many birding stops in the forest, I looked up and saw what could only have been an adult **Cassin's Hawk Eagle** soaring high over the forest.

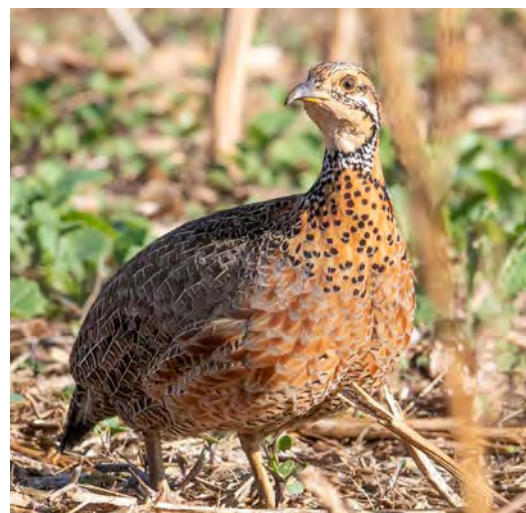
From Chuka, Pete and I drove north to our overnight destination of *Marania Farm*, which is at an altitude of 2500-2700m. As soon as we arrived, the farm manager, Damian Fison, took us out to the tussock grasslands on the farm, where a pair of **Sharpe's Longclaws** put in an appearance before it got dark.

Back at the grasslands the next morning, we found they were heaving with high altitude specials. **Common Quail** seemed to call from every tussock, and **Wing-snapping Cisticolas** and **Sharpe's Longclaws** displayed overhead. It was not long before the

first **Elgon Francolin** (now a separate species from Moorland Francolin) called, but it took us a while to get a good look at them. After an hour of searching we found a confiding pair that fed and called a short distance from our car. (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S75437063>) Not far from the francolins we found a family of **Yellow-necked Spurfowl** — quite bizarre to have both species present and breeding at the same site.

After a quick breakfast we headed down the mountain to Imenti Forest and opted to bird along the tracks at the edge of the forest. Highlights included **Crested Guineafowl**, **Brown-backed Woodpecker**, **White-eared Barbet**, **Moustached Tinkerbird**, **Purple-throated Cuckooshrike**, **Black-fronted Bush-shrike**, **Black-headed Apalis**, and **Waller's** and **Kenrick's Starlings**.

On the way back to the farm we took a quick detour into a forest area situated along the well-maintained road beyond Marania Forest Station. We found a recently constructed large dam having a pair of **African Black Ducks** and we had excellent views of **Booted Eagle** and a juvenile **Crowned Eagle**. In the early evening back on the farm Damian found us a stunning and confiding **Mackinder's Eagle Owl** (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S74814851>). A brief drive later that night was interrupted by rain, but we did manage to see two servals, bushpigs, a few porcupine and plenty of **Montane Nightjars**.



Elgon Francolin Photo by Peter Steward



Eastern Golden Weaver on nest. Photo by Peter Steward

We left *Marania Farm* the following morning at dawn and decided to stop at Imenti Forest again, gladly adding a **Common Whitethroat** to our list. Driving east along the Nyambene Hills we headed towards Ngaia Forest and Meru National Park. This drive is spectacular and we wished we could explore the forest patches along the way. We arrived at Ngaia Forest at the worst possible time of day, but decided to try our luck regardless. However, the main track through the forest seems to be the route taken by farmers that live on one side of the forest and who farm on the other, and the result was a steady stream of motorbikes.

This annoyance aside, the forest is spectacular and still of incredible quality. Our best birds here were a **Southern Yellowbill**, an **Eastern Nicator** and a very stoic **Narina Trogon** that happened to be perched and calling just metres away from music blasting from a broken down *pikipiki* (motorbike).

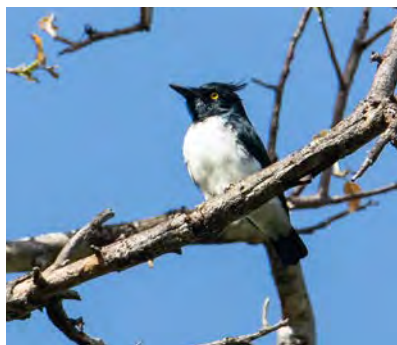
Meru National Park

We were pleased to find good numbers of migrants whilst driving through Meru National Park on the way to *Rhino River Camp* — **Wheatears** (**Isabelline**, **Northern**, and **Pied**) and **European Rollers**. We arrived at camp late in the day and opted to spend the remaining daylight hours on the nature trail going through the camp. Highlights included a family group of **Retz's Helmetshrike**, a **Red-capped Robin Chat**, calling **Eastern Nicators**,

a family of **White-eared Barbets** and hundreds upon hundreds of **Eurasian Bee-eaters** (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S74814861>).

We started out the next day in the park's Rhino Sanctuary where we had a calling **Eastern Black-headed Batis**. We then drove straight towards the Rojeweru River area east of Elsa's Kopje and then proceeded to drive the tracks near the river. A female **African Finfoot** gave us a brief, but satisfactory, view. Other interesting birds included a **Trumpeter Hornbill**, at least two **Eurasian Hoopoes**, numerous **Black-bellied Sunbirds**, and a pair of **Golden-breasted Starlings**. On the way back to camp we found a **Secretarybird**, two **Western Banded Snake Eagles**, a few **Steppe Eagles**, and a few pairs of nesting **Wahlberg's Eagles** (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S74917617>).

A somewhat depressing observation was the complete absence of vultures and



Black-and-white Shrike-flycatcher Photo by Peter Steward

Tawny Eagles in the park. No doubt these birds persist here, but they must be in very low numbers. I hope I am wrong.

In the evening we opted to explore the area surrounding the old Kampi ya Nyati site in the park. On a small track we flushed a pair of finches that drew our attention. We were elated when they flew up and we found ourselves staring at a pair of **Orange-winged Pytilia**. Over the next 30 minutes we found multiple pairs in this general area and at one point we had 7 birds in view at the same time.



Orange-winged Pytilia Photo by Peter Steward

As the sun was setting, we were walking on the road back into camp when suddenly we heard a distant, but distinctive solitary hoot from along the Rojeweru River. We froze and listened carefully for a few minutes. Every 10 seconds or so the bird would call and it was the deep pure bass hoot of a **Pel's Fishing Owl**. We rushed back to camp to pick up a microphone to make a recording, but the bird unfortunately did not call again that evening. (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S74917619>).

We spent our final day birding around the campsite. Highlights included a confiding **Southern Yellowbill**, a pair of **Lizard Buzzards**, **Jameson's Firefinch**, a family of **Hinde's Babblers**, and finally one of our target species — a pair of **Black-and-white Shrike-flycatchers** that flew into camp right as we were leaving — a new bird for both our Kenya lists! (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S75024643>).

(See the October Big Day report on pg. 24 for a more of Stratton and Pete's birding trip)





A Global Birding Phenomenon

"On 17 October more than 32,000 birders from around the world ventured out into backyards and beyond to enjoy birds for October Big Day. Birders from 168 countries participated, including more than 460 in Africa, 1,800 in Asia, 2,300 in Europe, and 3,900 in South America. This global team, united by birds, found an astounding 7,128 species in one day, breaking the world record for the most species reported in a single day." <https://ebird.org>.

Madagascar Bee-eaters by **Abigail Church**
birding in the Tsavo trianlge



OCTOBER BIG DAY 2020

The eBird birding challenge held on 17 October 2020 was a big success for Kenya. Birders around the country recorded an amazing 814 species, coming in 5th in the world, and #1 in Africa.



Red-chested Cuckoo. Photo by Brian Finch

Finch Paddock and Nairobi National Park

Team members: Brian Finch & Nigel Hunter

Report by Brian Finch

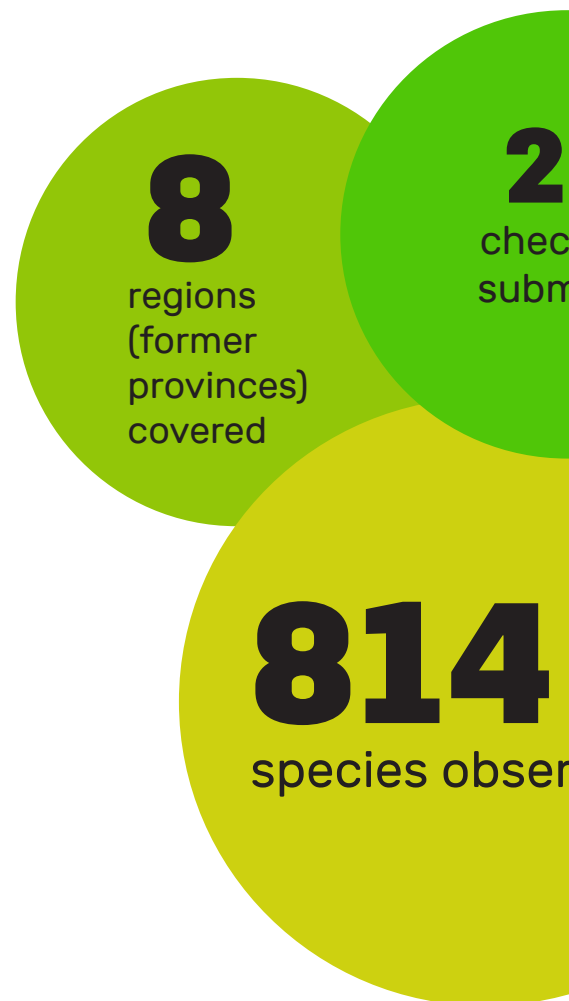
It was soon after 5.00 a.m. on the eBird Big Day in October that I went and sat in a chair in our paddock. It was still completely dark. **African Wood Owls** were calling and a **Montane Nightjar** started singing. I could also hear the nightjars give their flight calls, which were suddenly all around me with some five birds singing. After ten minutes, with a beautiful rose glow rising across the eastern horizon, they all went quiet. It looked like it was going to be another sunny day and it was dawning with species after species, including **White-eyed Slaty Flycatcher**, **Rüppell's Robin Chat**, **Northern Double-collared Sunbird**, **Hadada Ibis** and **African Goshawk** announcing their presence.

Nigel arrived on the scene just after 6:15 a.m. and we birded until 7:30 a.m. when we departed for Nairobi National Park. With little traffic on the roads it was only ten minutes later that we entered through the Main Gate and proceeded down the tarmac road from the entrance. We stopped and listened to the birds that were calling, but we had had every single one listed already from the paddock. It wasn't until we got close to the Ivory Burning Site that we had new species — a singing **Garden Warbler**, **Slate-coloured Boubou**, **Blue-naped Mousebird**, and **Zanzibar (Sombre) Greenbul**.

Continuing to Nagolomon Dam we crossed the drift and found a **Spotted Thick-knee**. The dam itself gave up a selection of waterbirds, but nothing out of the ordinary. We searched for Little Bittern in the *Typha* as this was a very “iffy” bird that may not be encountered by anyone out birding today... but it was not to be seen.

On the back road to Hyena Dam were large numbers of **Wattled Starlings**, but no hoped for Palearctic migrants. Species kept on coming, but again nothing out of the ordinary. Hyena Dam was the bleakest ever — there was nothing and the day was turning out to be grey and gloomy, with no sign of a blue sky. It was therefore a welcome lift to our spirits when at the Hyena Dam run-off we found **African Water Rail**, a single **Long-toed Plover** and five **Sand Martins**. We looped back around to Nagolomon Dam and there was the beautiful male **Little Bittern** busily flashing his wings to disturb frogs.

October Big Day 2020 by the numbers in Kenya



In a spectacular effort birders spent the day watching birds at a site of their choosing and recorded the different species they saw or heard.

59

checklists
submitted

907

hotspots visited

erved

Birding in Kenya spanned 907 sites across the country and the checklists submitted indicated a tally of 815 different species. The following are stories from some of the birders and Kenyan teams who took part.

The day's total was now over 120 species. Heading towards the Kingfisher area there was a fruiting fig that was attracting **Violet-backed Starlings**, our own endemic **Snowy Barbet** (now split off from White-headed Barbet) and the first **Blackcap** of the season, a male, with a **Saddle-billed Stork** in the grassland just below. The Kingfisher swamp had a singing male **Jackson's Widowbird** in full breeding plumage, and a number of **Parasitic Weavers** in the reed-bed. We arrived at Kingfisher Picnic Site, where there were quite a few socially distanced people. We chose the seats under the trees as they were vacant and looked around for anything new for the day, hopeful for the possibilities here.

Scarlet-chested Sunbirds galore

The *Acacia gerardii* trees were in flower and this was attracting large numbers of sunbirds that were busily chasing each other as they flew in and out of the trees. The dominant species was **Scarlet-chested** — I had never seen the likes of this before, there being about forty present. With them were **Bronze and Variable**, but also at least three **Beautiful Sunbirds** (now called Gorgeous Sunbird on some lists), a rarity from the lowlands, which were coming into breeding plumage.

There was a very bouncy **Brown Parisoma** giving loud refrains, a **Northern Olive (Abyssinian) Thrush**, which was the first I had ever seen here and a noisy **Red-faced Cisticola**.

The road down Leopard Cliffs to Baboon Cliffs was closed. This was normally a rewarding stretch, so it was goodbye Pallid Honeyguide and whatever else was there, for an unrewarding long detour all the way to the main South Road enroute to the Athi Basin. The grasslands were deathly quiet and devoid of birdlife. Where on earth do all the wet-season grassland species vanish to when it gets drier? No pipits, no longclaws, no larks, no bustards. The Vulture Drinking Pools at the top of the Athi Basin had only **White-backed Vultures** and **Marabou Storks**, which were in droves along this part of the Mbagathi.

We descended to Athi Dam where with great disappointment we found there were no surprises and plenty of hoped for things including Palearctic waders were absent. We could not complain about **Eurasian Bee-eaters** however, they were numerous all over the park and are having a great showing this year. **Barn Swallows** were also in large numbers.

Blue skies appeared for a brief period of fifteen minutes in the afternoon



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before it started raining lightly. From the dam we visited Rhino Circuit and this was rewarding with many woodland species including **Violet Wood-hoopoes**, **Fischer's Lovebirds**, and **Red-throated Tit**. At the river was a handsome **Grey-headed Kingfisher** of the brown-headed Middle-eastern race *semicaerulea*.

We saw the male **Greater Painted-snipe** and two **Common Snipe** at Karen Primary School Dam, whilst at Eland Hollow Dam three **White-faced Whistling Ducks** were our only non-Egyptian Geese waterfowl the entire day. Two adult male **Hartlaub's Bustards** appeared together on the track and a male **Whinchat** was definitely a poser. Finding our way back to the gates, we drove across the bridge over the Mokoyeti at Nagolomon Dam, when Nigel braked and said, "I should have stopped to look", and I replied that he would not sleep tonight wondering what we might have seen if we had stopped. We backed up and there on the river was an adult **Black Stork**!

We drove on to Langata Gate, and got our last two new species for the day (**Little Grebe** and **Common Moorhen**) on Langata Dam. The road was wet in this part of the Park, and from 3:30 p.m. it was like dusk. We were through the Langata Gate shortly after 5:00 p.m. and Nigel dropped me off. The idea was that I would have the last watch of the evening in the Paddock for Golden-tailed and Brown-backed Woodpecker, but they never materialised. My day ended as it started, but with gloomier skies and a good amount of rain.



Common Snipe. Photo by Brian Finch

Angama, Mara Triangle

A solo expedition and report by Tyler Davis

We had 195 species total in the Mara Triangle, including 116 just at Angama. They included **Red-winged Francolin**, **Fawn-breasted Waxbill**, **Green-backed Twinspot**, **Yellow-bellied Hyliota** and **Black-backed Cisticola**.

North Coast

Reported by James Apolloh Omenya

Team members: James Apolloh Omenya, David Ngala, Daniel Kazungu, Erick Menza, Sadam Kailo, Mohammed Ali, Kibwana Ali, Hassan Said, Salma Mazrui, Samson Katisho, Albert Baya, Colin Jackson

We coordinated to make sure that all habitats were well covered, including Mida Creek/Matsangoni, Arabuko-Sokoke Forest, Sabaki River mouth, Malindi town, Lamu/Manda Island, Mwangea Hill and Dakatcha Woodland.



Malindi Pipit. Photo by Peter Usher

It was very exciting to voluntarily participate in the Big Day. Our team had arranged to camp in Arabuko-Sokoke Forest in order to find owls and the early birds. Indeed our first awesome bird was a **Southern White-faced (Scops) Owl**, which we saw at 2:20 a.m. By the end of the day we had listed over 120 birds, including some, which were lifers to me. It was a great and rewarding experience.

Highlights from various teams on the north coast: **Donaldson Smith's Nightjar**, **Crab-plover** (Mida Creek), **Red-footed Booby** (A Rocha Kenya), **Ayres's Hawk Eagle**, **Sokoke Scops Owl**, **Mangrove Kingfisher**, **African Broadbill** (Arabuko-Sokoke), **Three-streaked Tchagra**, **Square-tailed Drongo**, **Blue-mantled Crested-flycatcher**, **Manda Black Boubou** (Manda Island), **Malindi Pipit**, **Terrestrial Brownbul**, **Scaly Babbler**, **Magpie Starling** (Sabaki River mouth), **Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin** (Bush Chat), and **East Coast Akalat**.

Castle Forest Lodge, Mount Kenya

Team members: Stratton Hatfield and Peter Steward

Report by Peter Steward

Our morning started in the twilight mist of the forest on the southern slopes of Mount Kenya, in pursuit of **Olive Ibis** (also called African Green Ibis). The Olive Ibis is a very difficult bird to find, but there is a pair known to roost in the forest around the Castle Forest Lodge. We felt the pressure to ensure we ticked it off for Kenya!

We need not have worried though, as we listened for their song, a pair of Ibis loudly bugled from their roost somewhere in the gloom. We tracked them down to a dead snag below the trail that leads up to the lodge. They were spooked when they caught sight of us and flew off, but not before we got some sound recordings. This is usually all you get to see of the Ibis at the lodge, but we had some more luck later in the morning.

As we tracked back up the trail towards the lodge a **Bat Hawk** sped by chasing after its usual prey who were returning to roost in the cavities of the tall trees scattered around the lodge grounds — we were off to a good start!



Moustached Tinkerbirds. Photo by Peter Steward

We continued higher up the trail ticking off our targeted Afromontane species. Stratton very excitedly picked out the low pitch *mmmmoooooooooooooooooooo* of a **Buff-spotted Flufftail** coming from the impenetrable understorey bounding the trail. We managed to get audio recordings, but viewing this skulker in such dense undergrowth was impossible. Other target species that we were particularly pleased with were the **Eastern Bronze-naped Pigeon**, **Barred Long-tailed Cuckoo**, **Scarce Swift**, **Doherty's Bush-shrike**, and **Abbott's Starling**. See our list of audio and images at <https://ebird.org/checklist/S74915596>

After breakfast we went back down the trail from the lodge enroute to the forest gate. Along our way we added a few more birds to our list, including **Ayres's Hawk Eagle**, **Purple-throated Cuckooshrike**, **Black-fronted Bush-shrike**, **African Hill Babbler**, and **Waller's Starling**. We stopped to check the river at the very edge of the forest and were rewarded with fabulous views of the Olive Ibis perched up in a tree above the water. See this list of audio and images: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S74917224>



Olive Ibis. Photo by Peter Steward

From the forests south of Mount Kenya we looped around to the east. As we drove up through the beautiful forest along the Chogoria trail, we were listening for Orange Ground Thrush. However, each time we tracked into the forest following a promising phrase of song it turned out to be a **Brown-chested Alethe**. Unfortunately the clouds came with cold rain quite early in the afternoon, but we managed to get up to the bamboo zone before we turned back. Despite the poor weather and limited time, we had seen or heard some great birds including **Kenya Crested Guineafowl** (*Guttera pucherani pucherani*), **Bar-tailed Trogon**, **Fine-banded Woodpecker**, **Kandt's Waxbill**, **Grey-headed Negrofinch**, **Mountain Yellow Warbler**, **Eastern Mountain Greenbul**, and **White-starred Robin**.

The real surprise of Chogoria was a small drongo hawking over the trail in the low elevation forest, which at first we assumed was a Fork-tailed (Common).

However, something about it was nagging at Stratton — he later decided that it looked like a **Square-tailed Drongo**, which would be a first for the area! (If you are visiting the lower forests of Mount Kenya, please keep an eye-out and take photos and sound-recordings of any drongos.) See this list for audio and images: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S74925290>



View of Mount Kenya peak. Photo by Peter Steward



Eurasian Golden Oriole (left) and African Finfoot. Photos by James Kashangaki

Muthoki Lodge, Wamunyu

Team members: Raphael Mwendwa, Steven Waweru, James Kashangaki

The lodge is located along the Machakos-Kitui highway between Masii and Wamunyu, with the Athi River to the north and Muthetheni village to the south.

Muthoki Lodge is located in a 40 acre, quaint, peaceful tree farm in Masii, Machakos county. It offers fully furnished and serviced studio bungalows. Raphael Mwendwa and Steve Waweru, two young bird enthusiasts and myself (James Kashangaki) got to the lodge on Friday evening. Over dinner we planned our attack of the huge area we intended to cover. We also secured the services of “Uncle Patrick”, a retired teacher who knows everything about the local trees of the area.

From 5:30-9:30 a.m. on the day, we visited the indigenous and planted forest on the farm, spending time around a small dam and apiary. We then took a quick breakfast, picked up our new Uncle and headed north to the Athi River using a myriad of back roads. After several missed turns and unclear directions from great people along the way, we arrived and spent about two and a half hours walking along the southern bank.

It was in the heat of a merciless mid-day sun that we retraced our journey, to cross the Machakos-Kitui highway, to reach a huge dam in the village of Muthetheni. I hadn't been there for almost three years and we found that it was now possible to walk all the way around it without any challenges from the local landowners. On a good day one will find a healthy mix of water and bush birds, but it was now 3:00 p.m. and perhaps the timing was not ideal. We got around this area of water (Steve remarked that there must be some mistake in all the stories about Ukambani not having enough water), made a quick courtesy call on some relative, and walked around an impressive orange and mango orchard before it was time to drive back.

Over a pleasant dinner with a roaring bonfire in the background, we dissected our day. 79 species! Most of them

the usual ibis, bulbul, mousebird, etc., but there were some highlights, not least a female **African Finfoot** spotted when Raphael yelled “Snipe”. We never did find the snipe and we left it off the list. Also near the river we came across a **Northern Brownbul**.

Among the 30 species we found at the Lodge were the resident **Great (Black) Sparrowhawk**, **Eurasian Golden Orioles**, a striking white morph **African Paradise-flycatcher** and a couple of **Grey-headed Bush-shrikes**. We didn't see the owls, spurfowl, guinea fowl, woodpeckers, Lizard Buzzards or the hornbills that we had been assured. Our trip to the southern reaches of the pentad, where the Dam and Orchard were located, revealed an **African Goshawk**, **Western Yellow Wagtails** and three **Red-knobbed Coot**.

Uncle Patrick couldn't stop proclaiming to anyone who would listen, how he had never seen three more dedicated professionals who knew the name of every bird on earth (if only)! He was amazed that we had even forsaken eating lunch for our work. While perhaps not fully understanding what we were up to, he was nonetheless immensely proud to be our guide. The proprietor of *Muthoki Lodge* said that she was thinking of setting up her lodge as a place for naturalists and eco-tourism. Before our visit she thought setting up the place for birdwatchers meant putting benches in the woods so people could sit and see birds go by. She will rethink this in light of her experience with us.

In the end, we submitted our list of 79 species, mapped two previously unmapped pentads, Raphael got himself six lifers, and Steve promised to start mapping. A good time (if extremely tiring) was had by all.

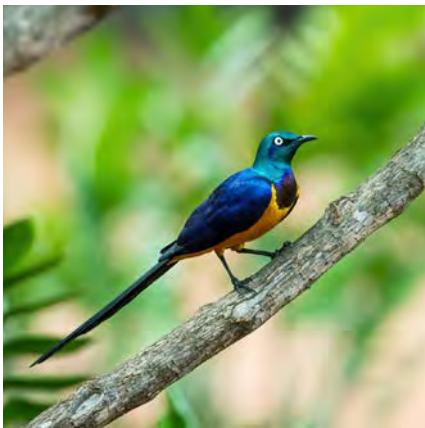
Selenkay, Porini Amboseli Camps

A solo expedition and report by Lankas Noi

Birds are magnificent creatures to watch. I never really cared about birds until my dad brought up the subject of accompanying him for birding. I was fascinated by the behavior of birds, particularly the eagles and migrants. I could never have thought a bird could fly thousands of miles without food or water, for days without perching and even cross oceans and seas. Birding has become a passion of mine.

I did most of my birding along the seasonal Olkeriai River in Kajiado county, where I got many interestingly awesome sightings.

I walked the river bank the entire morning. The **Golden-breasted Starling** was my best sighting (and first lifer) for the Big Day. Its bright yellow breast made it glimmer from afar. **Lilac-breasted Rollers** also attracted attention with their magnificent rainbow colours and their rolling and diving — I'm pretty sure other birds envy the rollers!!



Golden-breasted Starling.
Photo by Nick Athanas

The Big Day encourages me as I now understand I am not alone. I am part of a new generation of birders across the entire planet, striving to monitor birds and collecting valuable data about their distribution. I am glad to have participated in my first global bird count courtesy of ebird.org.



BIG DAY

This year the eBird Big Day will take place on 9 October 2021 — see the <https://ebird.org/> website for information. It is an event involving thousands of people across the world who do their bit for bird conservation and to help their country gain recognition as a birding hotspot!

To take part you can plan to go it alone or talk to other birders about forming a team. Make arrangements to visit a birding site — a park or farm, a road or river near you, or just birdwatch at your home. If your team can travel to a distant or remote area it will help to add out-of-the way species toward the country total.

Last year Kenya had a 505% increase in the number of participants — the largest participation growth for any country last year! Let's show up again and pull together. Send your name, contacts and location to <news@naturekenya.org> or to Pete Steward on WhatsApp +44 7473 957279. Let us see to it that Kenya remains the no.1 birding destination on the continent and among the top birding countries in the world!

"It was great! I identified about 50 species of birds including some of their calls."

Dominic Mukulo,
birding in Malava
Forest on the 2020
Big Day



Remember to also submit your Big Day records to the Kenya Bird Map at kenya.birdmap.africa (Get an update on the project on page 20.)

IMPORTANT BIRD AREA

YALA'S

Indigenous and Community Conserved Area

Emily Mateche

Yala Swamp, including lakes Kanyaboli, Namboyo, and Sare, is one of the most extensive freshwater wetlands in the country. It is one of the few shelters of the nationally threatened sitatunga antelope and Lake Kanyaboli provides a safe haven for critically endangered haplochromine cichlids fish species. The swamp provides critical stopover habitat for thousands of migratory birds, including Barn Swallows and Yellow Wagtails.

Some 8,404ha in the heart of Yala Swamp have been designated as an Indigenous and Community Conserved Area (ICCA). This is helping protect critical habitat for wildlife, including migratory birds.

Within the ICCA, local community conservation champions, the *Yala Ecosystem Site Support Group (YESSG)* has worked hard to restore 66.7 ha of degraded wetland by planting papyrus. This is in keeping with the ICCA management committee guidelines for promoting the natural regeneration of papyrus in degraded and riparian areas.

YESSG has also planted 69,622 indigenous trees in the lower Yala River riparian zone and trained 90 crop-farming households in climate-smart farming techniques. These farmers are increasingly adopting agroforestry practices that keep trees in place even as they plant crops.

These measures are improving the swamp for birds. For the first time in five years a **Giant Kingfisher** was recorded in January 2020, in the lower stretches of the swamp (Bunyala-Sitome village) and in February 2020 along the fringes of Lake Sare in Usalu village. It was sighted again in February 2021, both at the manmade Lake Bob next to Bungu village and along Dhogoye causeway.

Other waterfowl species which were previously uncommon or rarely seen, but are now frequently recorded include **Lesser Moorhen, Water Thick-knee, Common Snipe, Spotted Redshank, Collared Pratincole, Abdim's Stork, Black-crowned Night Heron, Black-headed Heron, and African Darter**. The Endangered **Grey Crowned Crane** now inhabits the previously flooded rice paddies where




A volunteer participating in bird monitoring in Yala Swamp. **Photo by John Mwacharo**



A pair of Angola Swallows at Lake Kanyaboli. **Photo by John Mwacharo**

Dominion Farms used to operate. Papyrus endemics — **Papyrus Gonolek, White-winged Swamp Warbler and Carruthers's Cisticola** can be spotted with ease even along Kombo dyke at Lake Kanyaboli.

“The planting of papyrus will maintain and even increase the kind of habitat needed by papyrus endemics and migratory birds,” states Moses Nyawasa, the Project Extension Officer. “It also means that the prospects for people living around Yala Swamp, an area which could potentially attract ecotourism, will improve,” he adds. 

KAMALE NATURE RESERVE

Dakatcha Woodland Forest — a safe haven for Kilifi (Clarke's) Weaver

Edwin Utumbi

The Kamale Nature Reserve is made up of forest and several wetlands. The wetlands provide nesting habitat for the endemic and **Endangered Kilifi (Clarke's) Weaver**.

Other bird species recorded in the reserve include **Fischer's Turaco**, **Southern Banded Snake Eagle**, **Great (Black) Sparrowhawk**, **Chestnut-fronted** and **Retz's helmetshrikes**, and **Eastern Black-headed Oriole**. It is also home to the **Endangered** golden-rumped sengi (elephant shrew), and there have been field signs of buffalo. Through working closely with scientists from the National

1,800
acres for nature

The Kamale Nature Reserve was recently established in the Dakatcha Woodland Important Bird Area.

The land was purchased by *Nature Kenya* with financial support from the *World Land Trust*, *African Bird Club (ABC)*, *RESOLVE*, and *DANIDA/Civil Society in Development*.



A section of Dakatcha Woodland. Photo by John Mwacharo

Museums of Kenya the local community has identified varieties of edible mushrooms. The mushrooms are now harvested for local consumption, and for sale to the tourist hotels in Malindi. The local Dakatcha Woodland Conservation Group oversees and monitors the reserve on an ongoing basis and, where necessary, moves to mitigate illegal activities, like charcoal burning. Plans are underway to develop a site management plan, which will guide species conservation and day-to-day management of the nature reserve. f

What is the impact of rising water levels in Rift Valley lakes on Lesser Flamingo

Paul Gacheru

Contrary to what one might expect many water birds are in danger as water levels drown out areas needed for feeding and breeding. Some of the most affected species have been Lesser Flamingo.

Over the past 10 years, the water levels in Rift Valley lakes have been steadily rising and no one really knows why. One plausible reason is the accumulation, in the lake beds, of surface run-off from nearby forest catchment areas. This may be happening as a result of forest degradation and soil erosion.

The annual waterbird counts in January 2021 found that at Lake Bogoria **Lesser Flamingo** numbers were down to 500,000 from previous counts of up to two million. Low populations were also recorded at Lake Nakuru and Lake Elmenteita. Lesser Flamingo feed on blue-green algae/cyanobacteria, and it could be that changes in water quality have reduced the availability of their food.

Also, there are reports that have hit the news headlines of Lesser Flamingos getting caught in the thorny trees around the lakes presumably because there is less dry land around the lakes.

Further monitoring is needed to evaluate the overall impact of this phenomenon on Lesser Flamingos in the region. f



A flock of Lesser Flamingos on the shores of Lake Bogoria. Photo by Caroline Chebet

DANGER!

Threats from high voltage power lines at Lake Elmenteita



Great White Pelicans on the shores of Lake Elmenteita. Photo by John Mwacharo

John Kiptum and Paul Gacheru


The year 2020 ended on a sad note for bird conservation with reports of dead flamingos at Soysambu Conservancy, Lake Elmenteita. Images of flamingo carcasses lying on the ground next to electric pylons were shocking. A month later, in January 2021, three **Critically Endangered** Rothschilds giraffes were electrocuted by low-hanging powerlines, which caused a national public uproar. Powerlines along major flyways and wildlife migratory routes are proving to be a significant threat to wildlife.

Lake Elmenteita is a designated Wetland of International Importance ('a Ramsar site'), an Important Bird Area, and a Key Biodiversity Area. Lake Elmenteita is also one of the few breeding sites for **Great White Pelican** in Africa.

Together with other alkaline lakes (Natron, Magadi, Nakuru and Bogoria), Lake Elmenteita is an important foraging site for **Lesser Flamingo** and is an integral part of the African-Eurasian flyway. Billions of birds use this flyway to migrate from their wintering grounds in Africa to their breeding sites in Europe and Central Asia.

Kenya is seeking to lead the way as a green energy economy. Energy sector stakeholders, including the Ministry of Energy and Petroleum and its agencies, are obliged to safeguard the environment and its biodiversity.

Power expansion projects in areas deemed critical for biodiversity conservation should be avoided. These include migratory flyways and breeding sites such as Lake Elmenteita where birds transit, feed, rest, and nest. Wherever possible, avian safety measures should be adopted and incorporated as this is considered international best practice, to minimize the impacts of power lines to birds.

Collisions with power lines and electrocution constitute a real threat to migratory birds and other species. 



Herders with cattle at Dide Waride, Tana River Delta. Photo courtesy of BirdLife International

IMPORTANT BIRD AREA

Restoring the Tana River Delta

Caroline Chebet

The Tana River Delta spreads out over 130,000 ha and is comprised of flood plains, extensive mangroves, beautiful pristine beaches, and salt and fresh water zones that form a network of productive areas for farming.

However, besides having to weather floods and frequent droughts, the delta is in danger from changes due to human activities like deforestation and overgrazing, which have been devastating to people and the area's amazing wildlife.

The Restoration Initiative

To combat these challenges within the Delta, Nature Kenya is implementing a Global Environment Facility project called The Restoration Initiative (TRI). It aims to restore degraded landscapes in the Delta.

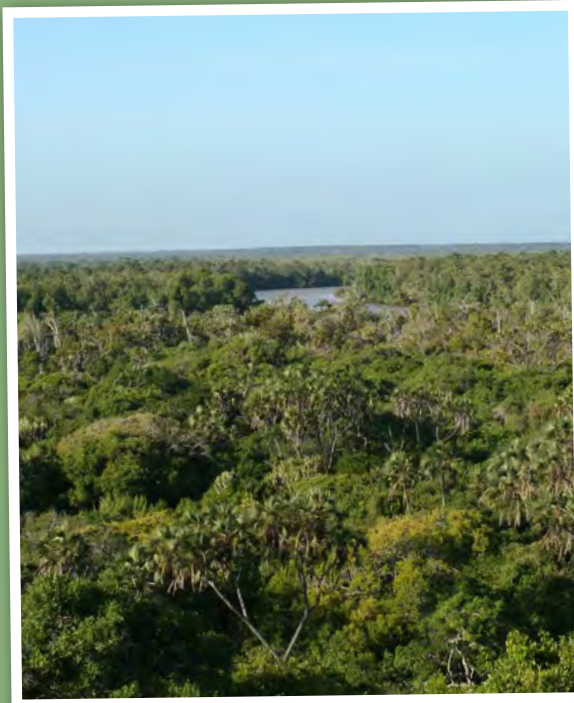
This includes restoring the rice paddies of Ozi and Mpeketoni, introducing chili farming in Harakisha and fish farming in Ozi, and promoting a new goat breed (Galla) in Handaraku, Hurara and other villages.

In Ozi, where the regular intrusion of salty sea water affected rice production over many years, the project is already having an impact. New, introduced rice varieties are doing well even in the brackish conditions.

The Initiative also aims to conserve critical areas that support biodiversity, including mangroves and riverine forests.



Tree planting at the Tana River Delta.
Photo by Hassan Golo



Mangrove and dune forest in Ozi, Tana River Delta. Photo by Peter Usher



Photo by Jennifer Adhiambo

Galla goats, building community resilience in Tana River Delta

Jennifer Adhiambo

The ability of pastoralists in the county of Tana River to adapt to climate change is very low — poverty and illiteracy levels are still very high, and the average distance to a water source is still very far (about 10 km from grazing areas).

The Tana Delta Conservation Network Site Support Group (TDCN-SSG) is an umbrella body of CBOs bringing together 105 community-based organisations (CBOs) and self-help groups within the Tana Delta. Formed in 2014 its main focus is agriculture, fishing and livestock.

To help local communities better cope with current and future climate variability, the TDCN-SSG initiated a goat-keeping enterprise (supported by the Darwin Initiative), in which a new breed of goat, the Galla, was introduced. Galla goats have a reputation for surviving drought and are more resilient to changing climate conditions. Communities received 180 Galla bucks for the improvement of local breeds (through a project dubbed *Rebuilding Community Resilience-Building in Livelihood and Disaster Risk Management (REBUILD)* funded by the European Union).

The Galla goat breed is commonly referred to as the Boran or Somali goat. With this new goat breed, the EU REBUILD project is helping farmers increase their small ruminant-based meat and milk production substantively and sustainably, thereby increasing household incomes.

Tana River Delta is the second most important estuarine and deltaic ecosystem in eastern Africa. It is a Ramsar site, an Important Bird Area and a Key Biodiversity Area. It forms the northern limit of the Eastern Arc Mountains and Coastal Forests biodiversity hotspot and is a proposed World Heritage Site.



A section of one of the Kaya forests. Photo by Francis Kagama

Role of culture in the sustainable management of Mijikenda Kaya forests

Gibson Kitsao Mwatete

Kaya forests (Ma–Kaya) are found in coastal Kenya, along a strip that is approximately 50 km wide x 300 km long. They are residual areas of once extensive, lowland forest that are relatively small in size, ranging from 10 to 400 ha. There are currently 42 Kaya forests found in the counties of Kwale, Mombasa and Kilifi that are regarded as sacred by the Mijikenda community.

All Kaya forests bear a rich history or tradition of settlement. The word Kaya means home in most Mijikenda dialects. All ‘true’ Kaya forests once contained hidden fortified villages where the Mijikenda took refuge from their enemies when they first migrated to the region. These citadels are thought of as the resting places of their ancestors and still bear marks of human activity, particularly clearings and paths that have cultural and historical significance.

Some communities still bury their dead and perform various other traditional rituals and ceremonies in Kaya forests. For example, at the beginning of the Mijikenda year, before the rainy season, Kaya elders go to the shrines in these forests to pray for rainfall and to pray over their crop seeds.

There are a number of cultural beliefs and practices of the Mijikenda that have helped conserve Kaya forests:

- Kaya shrines are only accessible to bonafide Kaya elders. Trespassers risk inviting the wrath of ancestral spirits, thereby deterring would-be poachers, illegal grazing and firewood collection.
- Local community members are afraid of damaging any part of Kaya forests for fear of being summoned, grilled and reprimanded by the elders. The elders are looked upon with trepidation for being able to curse or expel a defiant individual from the clan.
- Mijikenda communities also hold mentoring sessions (known as dhome) for young

men and women in Kaya forests. Here, life skills are taught to youth transitioning from childhood to adulthood and these include teachings on the wise-use and management of natural resources.

- For curing diseases, local communities are still very dependent on medicinal herbs, harvested in Kaya forests.
- Income-generating activities like cultural dancing and tours are also incentives for the conservation of Kaya forests.
- Big trees mark the boundaries of Kaya forests, and felling them is prohibited. There’s a belief that bad luck will befall anyone who dares to cut down such a tree.

Kaya forests continue to be conserved by communities, and they play an increasingly important role in the protection of coastal birds, such as, **Fischer’s Turaco, Southern Banded Snake Eagle, African Golden Oriole, Plain-backed and Uluguru Violet-backed Sunbirds, Sokoke Pipit, and Spotted Ground Thrush.**

Examples of Kaya forests: Kaya Chonyi Forest Reserve and Kaya Jibana Forest Reserve in Kilifi County, Kaya Kwale and Kaya Bombo in Kwale, and Kaya Shonda in Mombasa County.



Photo by Francis Kagama



Ngulia hills, Tsavo West National Park (above) by Peter Usher and Yellow-billed Oxpeckers by Lorenzo Barelli.

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